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A GRADING STANDARD

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When every pupil knows how to learn and what to study, and does it when it should be done, grading-problems and grading-plans will be obsolete. As nearly as present-day observation can determine, that day is not at hand. If confessions of older people are true, there is scarcely an hour when we can omit the checking-up systems. The business man has to be driven through many experiences which he knows will be good for him. Circumstances and indisposition must be conquered by grown-up folks day after day because reputation or profit is at stake. And very few persons, young or old, will be educated outside of schoolrooms unless necessity drives them to it.

Presumably, primary pupils work for fun, intermediate pupils work from duty and obedience, high-school pupils begin to work for a reason, and college students prepare for social or business preparation. But there is no point at which the temporary goal of "grades" is not a spur. Anyone who doubts needs only to recall which was uppermost in his thought during his schooldays at the end of the report periods—What is my grade? or Am I now better fitted for my place in the world? Then he is invited to reflect upon the number of days, when indisposed or ill, he would have skipped classes if the attendance record—or the grade—were not to be endangered by indulging in the whim. If that reflection is true to fact, grading-plans may well be considered.

What is a grade?

What merit is required for an A grade?

One pupil who commits his lessons receives A from his teacher; another, who in the same class constantly finds some-

thing like it outside of school, in his experience, in his work, in his play doesn't keep his mind on the lesson and receives F. These same pupils receive diametrically opposite grades and appreciation from another teacher. Is there anything about grade-merit which can be standardized?

Until a standard is established, every whim of a teacher will be the grading-plan.

"I like to have my pupils think," said one teacher.

"I like to hear my own words," said another.

"Pupils must be able to remember what they study," said one.

"I always spend about two weeks trying to find out what each teacher likes to have me do," said one high-school girl.

"I never know what to do in that teacher's class," said one eighth-grade boy.

"One teacher says do it one way, and the other one says the opposite," said a mechanically trained boy.

"Do the way *I* say in *my* class, and the way *she* says when you are with *her*," one high-school teacher announced.

"This teacher doesn't do things the way I learned them last term," whimpered a fourteen-year-old girl.

"A bright pupil will do his own thinking, moreover, in spite of school methods," said President W. T. Harris in his essay "How I Was Educated."

If citizenship is the aim of education, it seems logical that the essentials of citizenship be employed as the mile-posts by which we guide and measure progress. The following propositions in the development of a standard are offered upon this supposition: Actual living is broader than schoolroom commands, and obedience to individual possibilities presents keener interest than obedience to school rules.

Any plan must be arbitrary. It must be elastic and changeable. But let the old method be succored until at

least something as good is ready for its place. The start must be made from the point at which we now stand.

First, there must be some standard which is good enough for pupils to reveal in the results of their efforts. Some one point of achievement must be selected in order that others may be comparatively higher or lower. "Good-enough," will have to be the level, and there must be gradations higher and lower. These stages have ordinarily been shown in symbols of letters or numerals. It is those symbols which pupils have hoped for in the extent to which they have "been good" and "studied hard" and "learned the lessons." That "good-enough" point may well be the middle point of what has been the marking system— $87\frac{1}{2}$ —usually designated by a letter which shows that the grade is between 85 and 90, as the middle point between 100 per cent, Perfect or A, and 75 per cent, which is Poor or E.

With 75 per cent as the vanishing point of acceptability in most marking systems, the symbols rise in steps of five points each as 75-79, 80-84, 85-89, 90-94, 95-100. If we let these groups be represented by FIVE, FOUR, THREE, TWO, and ONE, instead of by letters or numerals, there will be less confusion. On a basis of actual rating these groups might have to range from 50 to 100 in order to show real comparative variations, but the premise remains the same whether on a basis of ten points or five points to the group.

It is immaterial, also, whether we use only one group which shows that the work is ACCEPTABLE, or two properly named groups, or three, or four, or five. It may be questioned, further, whether there exist five recognizable variations in pupils' abilities within the limit of acceptable achievement. Still it has been done, and will continue to be done long after this effort is made. It is, of course, understood that no pupil fits exactly into any one group, but if teachers use their judg-

ments within the limit of the requirements mentioned below rather than upon recital of what the book "says," the pupil will be nearer to equality of educational opportunity. However, one thing is certain: He will be in the "good-enough" group, above it, or below it. What we are concerned about is—What puts him there?

A THREE (85 to 89) is "good-enough" when 75 per cent is considered the passing grade. Now what should be required of the pupil to merit this rank? Eight essentials are stated: (1) willingness to apply himself through the class hour; (2) alertness and awareness during the class discussions; (3) attentiveness to assignments; (4) arrival at class with tasks completed in good manner and with reasonable freedom from carelessness; (5) prompt response to corrections and personal suggestions; (6) contribution to class discussions occasionally; (7) general vigor in attacking problems with ample curiosity and inquisitiveness when he finds "something different"; (8) retentiveness of GENERAL plan and main principles of his study course *recollectively* rather than through memory as a definite project.

There they are—without a word about "what the teacher says." The eight arbitrary requirements seem to cover every expected legitimate external sign of a pupil's effort. These signs may seem too lax or too stern in proportion to the amount a teacher prefers to have pupils recite the lesson or to have pupils think for themselves. But acceptance of them is necessarily temporary. With a THREE as the norm, or center point, the variations converge toward it or branch out from it. To justify the eight principles of classwork achievement, watch their application one by one to the business world. In business they represent in order: co-operation and aggressiveness, sharp wit, taking orders, despatch, adaptability, productivity, initiative, and clear thinking. The fact that different phrasing could have been used, or that other qualities might

have been added, does not alter the fact that the eight requirements must be present before we can say, "good-enough."

NEGATIVELY, there are some points which sidetrack teachers in the matter of grading, giving a false standard of merit to the discouragement of a majority of the class. The following types of pupils should be analyzed:

1. Parrot-memorizers, who have been falsely trained.
2. Rote-learners, who are lost when one word or step is gone.
3. Visitors (teacher's pets) who get so well acquainted with the teacher that he doesn't like to mark them low.
4. Stellar-lights, who are known by uplifted hands, always.
5. Bold pupils, who can talk without saying much.
6. Timid pupils, who know but can't say it.

In the next higher range there must be flexible adjustment in the rating of achievement—so much so that it seems unnecessary to say, "To this point a TWO must go; to that point a ONE must go." Care must be taken, also, that the teacher's ability is not made the point of satisfactory work. The pupil's rank among his fellows must determine that.

A ONE or TWO (90 to 100) must be better than "good-enough." There are certain comparative qualifications which set the student in this new rank. They will stand comparison with the group under THREE. The first item under THREE should be reread and followed by the first item mentioned in this new group, and others in the same manner. These are presented summarily by: (1) eagerness to tackle what is difficult; (2) interest in, and increasing the interest in, class discussions; (3) dependability in taking assignments and "a little more"; (4) completion of tasks promptly, neatly, and thoroughly; (5) comparative freedom from teacher's corrections and suggestions; (6) discovery of practical relations and uses for school work; (7) dependability in getting through difficult tasks; (8) ability to hold relations and rethink the problem.

What wouldn't the good business man give for a dozen young men who meet these requirements!

Then we must go below "good-enough" to learn how we shall maintain the general grouping of five limits within which we classify the results of student effort. A **FOUR** based upon the provisions of **THREE** would necessarily be slightly less than "good-enough." Here, too, it would be folly to say that a certain demarcation limits the **FOUR** and introduces the **FIVE**. Just as the two and **ONE** are comparative gradations upward in the line of the eight requirements, the **FOUR** and **FIVE** are gradations downward. Rather than go point by point along the course of the eight provisions, as was just done in the upward view, it may be more profitable to furnish a parallel list of the reasons why the **FOUR** and **FIVE** are not "good-enough": (1) they do their work too hastily or fritter away time they need; (2) they seem to be listless and inattentive; (3) they too frequently "misunderstand" assignments; (4) their work is too often fragmentary and careless; (5) they make the same errors over and over; (6) they seldom know anything that "wasn't in the lesson"; (7) they are likely to balk at "what they haven't done before"; (8) they do hold fragmentary "snap-shots" of what they have learned, but seldom display any retentiveness of relations, reasons, etc.

Any pupil who had all the defects mentioned here would not be worth more than 30 per cent, and certainly could not hold a job in a good business establishment. Still these shortcomings might be evident to such a low degree that the pupil could conscientiously be placed into group **FIVE** or even into group **FOUR**. If a pupil drops into **FIVE** in two characteristics, stands in **ONE** in five qualities, and stands in **THREE** in one (an improbable case) the teacher is not relieved of using judgment because of this requirement list. There must be as keen insight into the variables as ever. The advantage is that the attention of both teacher and pupil can be directed

toward development for citizenship to replace the narrow requirements of separate subjects and variable teachers' whims.

Pupils who fall below "good-enough" are likely to be those who have not understood the reason for being in school, whose interests lie outside of what they read or hear in class, but who are willing to go through the motions if the teacher insists sternly enough. Here we find many athletes, some boy-crazy girls and girl-crazy boys, most pupils whose parents *make* them go to school or get to work, many mechanically inclined pupils, many pupils who like to draw, and many who wish to earn something and do something worth while.

These pupils must be shown some sense to school—their youthful sense. Then they will take care of themselves like all the rest in school alertness, attentiveness, willingness, and achievement. These pupils have ability, energy, ambition, but they can't see the sense or use of all this school work and never did. Starting from everyday experiences in leading up to school work will find these pupils alert and "on their toes." They are full of practical knowledge, which is the only basis upon which they, or anyone else, will awaken to the real value of school work. They usually drop out of school early, driven out by questions and answers based upon **MEMORY**.

If there were a group six, it would constitute the failures who registered between 0 and 74. But failures *should* not be, despite the norms, curves, and proofs which show that from 5 to 14 per cent of pupils *must* fail in various courses. Two reasons are the only ones permissible for failure: Can't and Won't.

As for the Can't, a stage of imbecility is implied either in the pupil or in the subject-matter he is expected to master. In the Won't case, there obtains a similar condition on the part of the pupil. In either case the pupil should be removed to the proper institution. Inability, when it does occur, is

much less frequent than it is heralded. The occasional incompetent is to be pitied or put under a private teacher. As for the Won'ts, there are few who become so or remain so, unless the condition can be traced to the teachers' source (not necessarily the present ones). Someone along the line has accused them over and over, has disparagingly compared them with the bright pupils, or has hopelessly succumbed to their stubbornness. The parents' negative influence must not be omitted as a possible molding factor.

But what can be done for the portion of a class which now is listed among the failures which should not have been? Here may be inserted a short pedagogical preachment upon class methods and textbook content to support the statement that failures should not be. However, it is hardly probable that failures will disappear, because the kind of teachers who are to adapt the textbook content to proper class methods to reach these pupils is not likely to be numerous enough and these teachers are not likely to be receiving sufficient remuneration. It takes strong appreciation by way of approval and salary to inspire teachers to meet this need. This is what it requires:

1. The teacher must welcome the problem pupil as gladly as the bright one.
2. All pupils must be set on the same basis regarding the study-subject by a careful search among pupils as to their appreciation, their understanding, and their present knowledge of it before the class is permitted to work.
3. There must be such a motivating of the subject that every pupil in the class may find an excuse for saying that he likes the subject. Such opening words from a teacher as, "We shall start with page 165 this semester and go to page 380 by the end of the term," have driven out of school pupils and more teachers. An opposite teacher-type whose salary was doubled within a very few years, refused to permit pupils to

open their books until they had a good reason for doing so. She spent a few days vitalizing and practicalizing the subject. Someone asked, "How do you get pupils to work their heads off for you?" The reply was, "They have had the notion knocked out of their heads that they are working for me. They are having the time of their lives finding out something for themselves."

4. Every step of class progress must be made real. This requires courage beyond belief and work beyond expectation. First, however, it must be made almost criminal to accept blindly any idea which requires understanding, to accept from the pupil an answer when the process is required, to accept quotations when ideas are required, or to speak in idioms when thoughts are to be expressed.

Grading is not real; despite the **FIVE, FOUR, THREE, TWO,** and **ONE** groupings it is only comparative, of course. But grading makes or mars pupils; sometimes when too high, sometimes when too low. For that reason some hydrometer standard, some saccharimeter merit-system, or some quality and quantity scale would be delightfully appreciated. Meanwhile, the eight requirements for "good-enough" with their upward comparisons and their downward gradations seem to leave enough to teachers' judgments to keep the grading elastic. They define merit sufficiently to guide the teacher who fears that a pupil's grades will be too low or too high in comparison with what they were last time. These requirements, or any points adopted and fearlessly revised as deemed necessary, will give uniformity if every teacher is given the same merit-standard as a guide. The teachers of our building have had the summary constantly before them and pupils have had frequent access to the printed standard. The ordinary guessing grade is in some cases as good as any, but when both teachers and pupils have had in their hands the same points upon which this guessing grade is founded, the results have approved the grading standard.